



What is capitalism, anyway?

Capitalism. That's like *democracy*, isn't it?

(And aren't the enemies of capitalism the opponents of democracy? Didn't we defeat them in the Cold War?)

Actually, capitalism and democracy are two very different things. Democracy is, essentially, the idea that people should have control over their lives, that power should be shared by all rather than concentrated in the hands of a few. Capitalism is something altogether different.

In the United States (and other Western nations), we're used to hearing that we live in a democratic society. It's true that we have a *government* that calls itself democratic (although whether each of us really has an equal say, or much of a say at all, in such a bloated and atrophied "representative democracy" is worth asking), but whether our *society* is itself democratic is another question entirely. Government is only one aspect of society, of course; and it is far from the most important one, when it comes to considering day to day life. The economic system of any given society has more influence over daily life than any court or congress could: for it is economics that decides who has control over the lands, resources, and tools of the society, what people have to do each day to survive and "get ahead," and ultimately how those people interact with each other and view the world.

And capitalism is, in fact, one of the *least* democratic economic systems. In a "democratic" economy, each member of the society would have an equal say in how resources are used and how work is done. But in the capitalist economy, in which all resources are private property and everyone competes against each other for them, most resources end up under the control of a few people (today, read: corporations). Those people can decide how everyone else will work, since most of the others can't live without earning money from them. They even get to determine the physical and psychological landscape of the society, since they own most of the land and control most of the media. And at bottom, *they* aren't really in control, either, for if they let their guard down and stop working to keep ahead they will quickly be at the bottom of the pyramid with everybody else; that means *nobody* truly has freedom under the capitalist system: everyone is equally at the mercy of the laws of competition.



Postscript: A Class War *Everyone* Can Fight In

The poverty against which man has been struggling throughout history is not merely the poverty of material goods; the ennui and disorientation experienced by the members of the middle and upper classes in today's wealthy industrial nations have revealed the poverty of Western existence itself.

The problems that we face today cannot be traced to class conflict alone. It is not merely a question of the ruling class profiting at the expense of the proletariat, for we have seen that the profit that those with capital do make does not make their lives any more fulfilling. It does not matter whether a woman is buried alive in a prison, in a reform school, in a sweatshop, in a ghetto, in a prestigious university, in a condominium bought on credit, or in a mansion with a private swimming pool and tennis courts, so long as she is buried alive. Everyone suffers from today's status quo, albeit differently; but whether a man is starving on his minimum wage salary, exhausted by his repetitive responsibilities at the office, or befuddled by the feeling of emptiness that accompanies the undirected acquisition of material wealth, he has a stake in fighting for change. So we all, rich and poor, must band together to transform our situation.

This also means that there is no mythical "They." Innumerable radical movements and social critics have relied upon this concept to motivate people by stirring up hatred for the "evil orchestrators" of human suffering, the enemies who conspire against us. But this kind of thinking only serves to divide us against each other, and whether we are divided on class lines, on color lines, or according to other categories, we are distracted from the important issues and impeded in our progress. Our true "enemy" is the social forces and patterns at work between us, and it is these forces which we must come to understand and to struggle against.

This is not to say that there are not individuals whose behavior is particularly dangerous to their fellow human beings, insofar as it perpetuates and intensifies our present state of emergency. But even if these individuals do have negative intentions towards others, it is still unlikely that they possess a clear understanding of the extremely complicated conditions to which they are contributing. Our social and economic relations are snarled and harmful in such complex ways that no secret society of evil geniuses could ever have arranged this fate for us.

And let no one say these individuals are benefiting at the expense of the rest of us. If gaining material wealth and status in a murderous society really is benefiting, then we should just let things stay the way they are and put our energy into fighting each against all to get to the top of the dunghill. If these people's lives are not as impoverished as our own, our whole value system is bankrupt. It's understandable that some of us are jealous of their disproportionate control over the resources of our society . . . but it's not having stuff or status that makes life good, is it?

capital: wealth (money, property, or labor) . . . which can be used to create more wealth. example: factory owners who profit from selling goods created by the labor of workers in their factories are able to purchase more factories.

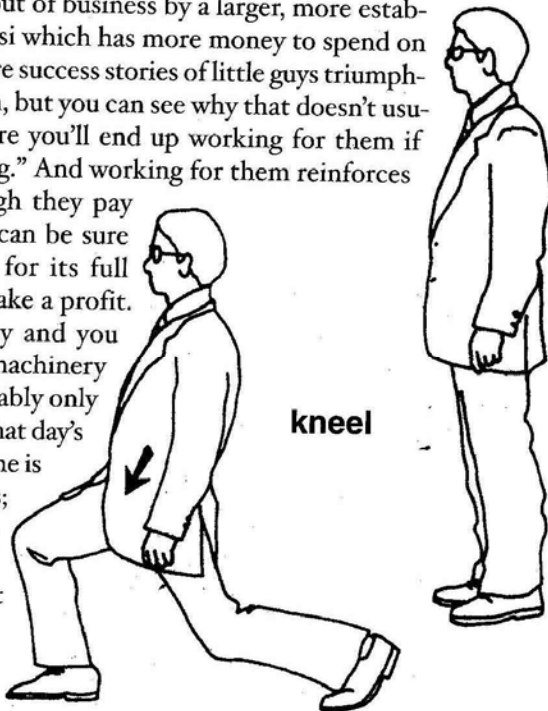
capitalism: the "free exchange of goods and services" . . . in which those who have capital are able to collect more, at the expense of those who do not.

How does capitalism work?

Here's how the free market is *supposed* to work: people are free to seek their fortunes as they choose, and the ones who work the hardest and provide the greatest value to society are rewarded with the greatest wealth. But this system has a crucial flaw: it doesn't actually offer equal opportunities for everyone. Success in the "free market" depends almost entirely on how much wealth you already have.

When capital is privately owned, an individual's opportunities to learn, work, and earn wealth are directly tied to the amount of wealth she has. A few scholarships can't offset this. It takes resources of some kind to produce something of value, and if a person doesn't have those resources herself she finds she is at the mercy of those who do. Meanwhile, those who already have those resources can make more and more wealth, and eventually most of the wealth of the society ends up in hands of a few. This leaves everyone else with little capital to sell other than their own labor, which they must sell to the capitalists (those who control most of the means of production) to survive.

This sounds confusing, but it's actually pretty simple. A corporation like Nike has plenty of extra money to open up a new shoe factory, buy new advertisements, and sell more shoes, thus earning themselves more money to invest. A poor sucker like you barely has enough money to open up a lemonade stand, and even if you did you would probably be run out of business by a larger, more established company like Pepsi which has more money to spend on promotion (sure, there are success stories of little guys triumphing over the competition, but you can see why that doesn't usually happen). Chances are you'll end up working for them if you need to earn a "living." And working for them reinforces their power: for although they pay you for your work, you can be sure they're not paying you for its full value: that's how they make a profit. If you work at a factory and you make \$1000 worth of machinery parts every day, you probably only get paid \$100 or less for that day's labor. That means someone is cashing in on your efforts; and the longer they do that, the more wealth and opportunities *they* have, at *your* expense.



61 C is for Capitalism

CRISIS IS BUSINESS

Economic crises are not natural disasters. They are brought about by the actions of bankers, officials, and developers, not to mention ordinary folks struggling to get by in a world we didn't choose. They appear beyond our control, but they are not inescapable facts of life.

For all the talk of collapse, capitalism itself is as healthy as ever. The fundamental relationships remain unchanged: employers and employees, politicians and voters, police and policed. Our masters may loan us cars or houses to pacify us, but we still lack control over our own lives.

Crises like this are part of the protection racket that keeps them in business. They profit on the industries that heat up the earth's atmosphere, and when hurricanes destroy our neighborhoods they replace them with condominiums and sell us energy-saving light bulbs. They profit on the invasions that secure more resources for the economy, and also on the occupations in which our friends and relatives die. They profited from the subprime mortgages that contributed to the latest disaster, and now they're profiting from the bailout.

Imagine another kind of crisis, one that could really pose a threat to their precious market: neighbors defending each other from eviction, workers seizing the goods they need, people building communities based on cooperation and self-determination. Imagine a world in which we'd never be vulnerable to the whims of the market again.

As far as we're concerned, it can't come soon enough.



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AS USUAL

The alienation, distrust and exhaustion we all feel in this society multiply our needs; and we run to commodities (invested with fetishistic power as they are by advertisements) hoping they can save us. But purchasing them only perpetuates our misery. For every time you buy something in this system, you're buying the whole system: you're giving your money to the corporations to reinforce their power, and to get that money, you have to give your labor to them too. That's more labor for them to maintain "business as usual," and less freedom for you to fight back!

I've resolved to get the fuck out any way that I can. I'm going to stop working for them, stop paying for all their products, stop believing in all the myths about having the perfect home and the perfect car and "getting ahead" in the (aptly named) "work force." I'm going to create a life for myself that I want to live, that I can find joy in, or die trying. But even if I do escape, how can I live the life I yearn for if all the people I care about, all the people around me and the world I live in itself, remain under the power of this system? It will be just as lonely being free if everyone else is still locked inside the schools and offices and factories, following instructions. If I want to truly get out of here, I have to figure out how to take the others with me. I walk down the street, watching smog pour into the sky from smokestacks, and I ache for a world in which it is up to us whether the stacks ever smoke again.

And where are the pleasure gardens that could have been built with all this labor, or the woods to wander through, the rivers to drink from, the lakes to swim in? Where are the eagles and moose to admire, or the stars in the light- and air-polluted night sky, for that matter? In my daydreams, I travel through beautiful wilderlands, meeting people who have unique customs and ways of life, who never heard of Pepsi, who never spent a day doing anything but what they please. Together we concoct wild schemes of how to wrest the most pleasure out of life, how to squeeze it to the very last drop . . . and we roll all our desires and fantasies together into one great ball, with which to smash open the gates to paradise itself.

How does this affect the average guy?

This means that your time and creative energy are being bought from you, which is the worst part of all. When all you have to sell in return for the means to survive is your own labor, you are forced to sell your life away in increments just to exist. You end up spending the greater part of your life doing whatever you can get paid the most for, instead of what you really want to do: you trade your dreams for salaries and your freedom to act for material possessions. In your "free" time you can buy back what you made during your time at work (at a profit to your employers, of course); but you can never buy back the time you spent at work. That part of your life is gone and you have nothing to show for it but the bills you were able to pay. Eventually



you start to think of your own creative abilities and labor power as beyond your control, for you come to associate doing anything but "relaxing" (recovering from work) with the misery of doing what you are *told* rather than what you want. The idea of acting on your own initiative and pursuing your own goals no longer occurs to you except when it comes to working on your hobbies.

Yes, there are a few people who find ways to get paid to do exactly what they've always wanted to. But how many of the working people you know fit into that category? These rare, lucky individuals are held up to us as proof that the system works, and we are exhorted to work really, really hard so that one day we can be as lucky as they

are, too. The truth is that there are simply not enough job openings for everyone to be a rock star or syndicated cartoonist; somebody has to work in the factories to mass produce the records and newspapers. If you don't succeed in becoming the next world-famous basketball star, and end up selling athletic shoes in a mall instead, you must not have tried hard enough . . . so it's your fault if you're bored there, right? But it wasn't your idea that there should be one thousand shoe salesmen for every professional basketball player. If anything, you can only be blamed for accepting a situation that offers such poor odds. Rather than all competing to be the one at the top of the corporate ladder or the one in a million lottery winner, we should be trying to figure out how to make it possible for *all of us* to do what we want with our lives. For even if you are lucky enough to come out on top, what about the thousands and thousands who didn't make it—the unhappy office clerks, the failed artists, listless grill cooks and fed up hotel maids? Is it in *your* best interest to live in a world filled with people who aren't happy, who never got to chase their dreams . . . who maybe never even got to have dreams?

What does capitalism make people value?

As Jeanette writes in her article on product and process, under capitalism our lives end up revolving around *things*, as if happiness is to be found in possessions rather than in free actions and pursuits. Those who have wealth have it because they spend a lot of time and energy figuring out how to get it from other people. Those who have very little have to spend most of their lives working to get what they need to survive, and all they have as consolation for their lives of hard labor and poverty are the few things they are able to afford to buy—since their *lives* themselves have been bought from them. Between those two social classes are the members of the middle class, who have been bombarded from birth with advertisements and other propaganda proclaiming that happiness, youth, meaning, and everything else in life are to be found in possessions and status symbols. They learn to spend their lives working hard to collect these, rather than taking advantage of whatever chances they might have to seek adventure and pleasure.

Thus capitalism centers everyone's values around what they *have* rather than what they *do*, by making them spend their lives competing for the things they need to survive and achieve social standing. People might be more likely to find happiness in a society that encouraged them to value their ability to act freely and do what they want above

of the work week until the moment I cash my paycheck weeks later, they get an interest-free loan in the form of my labor. And the landlord gets the same loan from me when I pay a month ahead for my lodgings—not to mention the government, which takes taxes out of my paycheck for a whole year in advance! In the meantime, I have to be careful not to turn the heat up higher than I can afford, or eat more food than I can afford, or talk to my faraway friends on the phone longer than I can afford . . . and when I'm shivering, and my stomach is growling, and I feel lonely, I can't help but be furious that, though technologies are in place that could easily keep me as warm and well-fed as could be, I have to pay dearly for every crumb—so a few rich men can gather more wealth at my expense! I work forty hours a week for the system that makes all these amenities possible—do I not *deserve* to turn the heat up as high as my boss can, just because I get dirtier on the job? Do I not *deserve* to taste the food at the restaurants he frequents, just because I don't want to fight my way up the corporate ladder?

It's much worse for some of my friends: they have credit card bills and loans to pay off. Those corporations have control over them for life: no matter what they may want to do, next month or ten years from now, they will be at their mercy. That's a few extra hundred dollars a month most of them have to raise, and that means unless they're willing to declare bankruptcy they'll never be free of the compulsion to sell their lives away. It enrages me every time I receive another promotional credit card application in the mail, knowing that these motherfuckers will do anything to suck me in, to trap me in the indentured servitude of debt. And I wince whenever I see my friends buying more stuff, in empty attempts to console themselves: of course they're desperate for freedom and excitement, living the lives that they do, but they're not going to find any of those things in a stereo or a new jeep! Spending their money like that just keeps them chained tighter to the system that is stealing their lives from them. Some of them spend the whole year working, their hearts silent within their chests, to save up the money for a few weeks and weekends of hiking, skiing, canoeing—things that were once free for all of us, before the corporations we work for wrapped everything in concrete.



80 C is for Capitalism

Enough abstractions! Let's talk about real life!

actual testimony by a real life member of the working proletariat!

How does it feel to never be treated like an adult? To never be free of rules and regulations put upon you "for your own good," to have to obey and grovel before teachers, bosses, policemen—because they serve masters who have more money and power over *your* life than you can ever hope to achieve? To have to beg and scheme and lie for an afternoon "off" to do what you want, for once? To answer to automated bells, to be at the mercy of machines and clocks and people with half your brains and personality, to be dressed in matching uniforms like identical bags of potato chips? To be required to recite standard phrases over and over all day—to be programmed like a machine?

Do you think it's really a coincidence that Coca-Cola is now sold on every corner of the earth? Do you really trust them to have all that power, to make this planet a place you want to live?

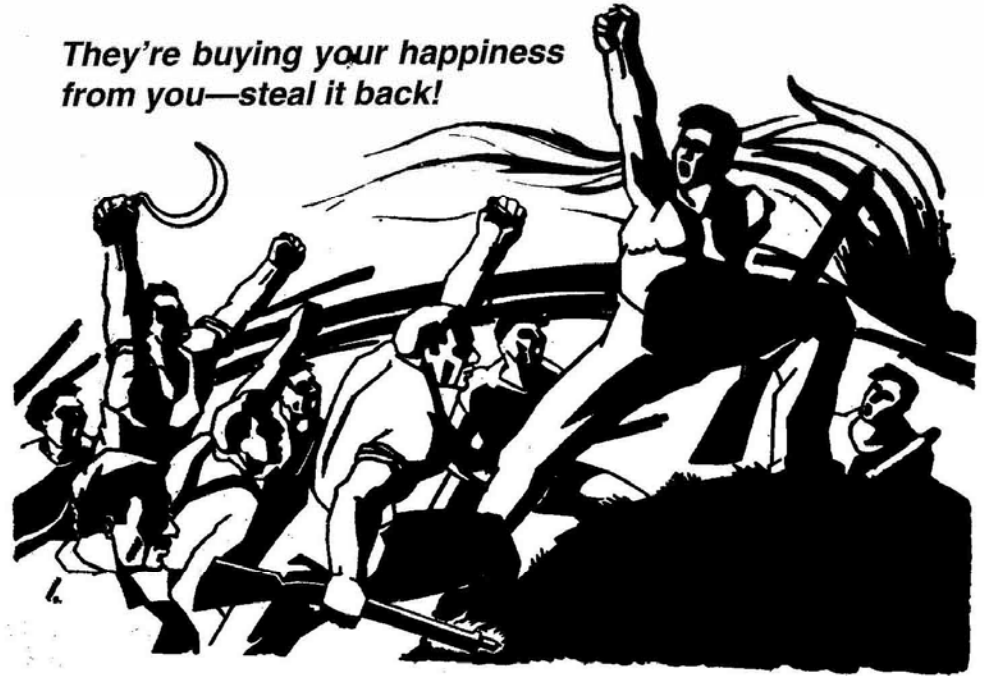
Every time I get home to find my mailbox filled with junk mail, every time I try to eat a quiet dinner with one of my lovers and we get interrupted by a phone call from a telemarketing company, I'm reminded that I live in a society that values sales more than privacy. Every time someone has a television on and a barrage of commercials assaults us, I remember how little truth and quiet reflection matter to the merchants out to make a "killing." Every time I ride my bike, I pass billboards proclaiming the power and sex appeal of various trivial products, and it infuriates me to imagine all the better uses that public space could have been put to. If only there was a way for us to decide what goes up on our own streets, besides writing graffiti!

And when bills come due, I'm reminded again of what counts in this golden age. I have to pay the rent at the beginning of the month, *before* I've stayed in the apartment for one night, but I don't get paid until at least three weeks *after* my work week begins—because the people who control the property I live on, and the workplace I have to serve in, have slanted everything in their favor. From the beginning

⁵ At the time of this writing, in some Latin American nations Coca Cola is responsible for the sales of over 60% of drinkable liquids of *any kind*. According to their five year report, their next objective is to make Coke machines more common than *water fountains*. Don't they realize they're just a soft drink company? The human body is over 90% water... how much of your body have you *purchased* from Coca Cola? How about from other corporations? They say you are what you eat . . .

all else. To create such a society, we will have to stop competing for control and wealth, and start to share them more freely; only then will everyone be completely free to choose the lives they most want to live, without fear of going hungry or being shut out of society.

***They're buying your happiness
from you—steal it back!***



"But doesn't competition lead to productivity?"

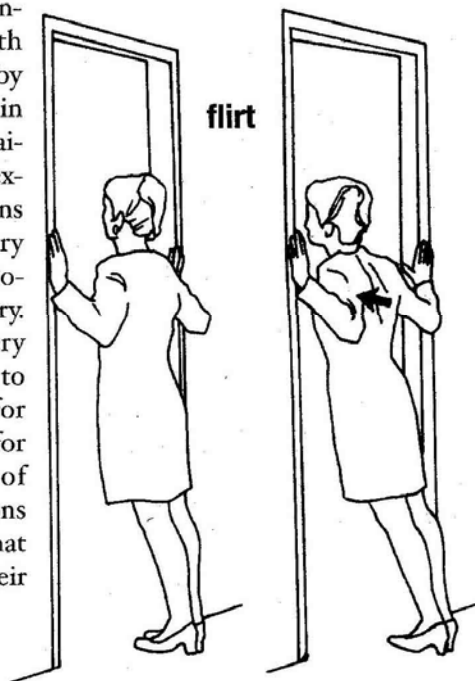
Yes—that's the problem. The competitive "free market" economy not only encourages productivity at all costs, it *enforces* it: for those who do not stay ahead of the competition are trodden under it. And what costs, exactly, are we talking about here? For one thing, there are the long hours we spend at work: forty, fifty, sometimes even sixty hours a week, at the beck and call of bosses and/or customers, working until we're well past exhausted in the race to "get ahead." On top of this, there are the low wages we're paid: most of us aren't paid nearly enough to afford a share of all the things our society has to offer, even though it is our labor that makes them possible. This is because in the competitive market, workers aren't paid what they "deserve" for their labor—they're paid the *smallest* amount their employer can pay without them leaving to look for better wages. That's the "law" of supply and demand. The employer has to do this, because he needs to save as much extra capital as he can for advertising, corporate expansion, and

other ways to try to keep ahead of the competition. Otherwise, he might not be an employer for long, and his employees will end up working for a more "competitive" master.

There's a word for those long hours and unfair wages: exploitation. But that's not the only cost of the "productivity" our competitive system encourages. Employers have to cut corners in a thousand other ways, too: that's why our work environments are often unsafe, for example. And if it takes doing things that are ecologically destructive to make money and stay productive, an economic system that rewards productivity above all else gives corporations no reason to resist trampling over wildlife and wilderness to make a buck. That's where our forests went, that's where the ozone layer went, that's where hundreds of species of wild animals went: they were burned up in our rat race. In place of forests, we now have shopping malls and gas stations, not to mention air pollution, because it's more important to have places to buy and sell than it is to preserve environments of peace and beauty. In place of buffalo and bald eagles, we have animals locked in factory farms, turned into milk and meat machines... and singing cartoon animals in Disney movies, the closest thing to wild animals some of us ever see. Our competitive economic system forces us to replace everything free and beautiful with the efficient, the uniform, the profitable.

This isn't limited to our own countries and cultures, of course. Capitalism and its values have spread across the world like a disease.

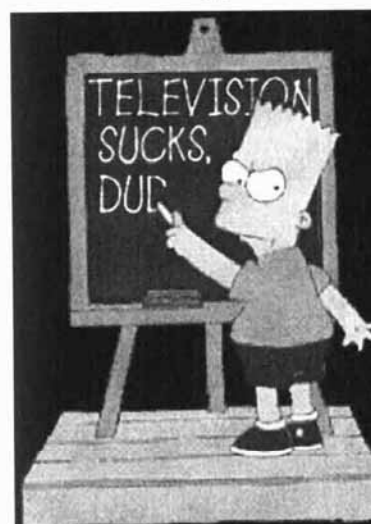
Competing companies have to keep increasing their markets to keep up with each other, whether by persuasion or by force; that's why you can buy a Coke in Egypt and eat at McDonalds in Thailand. Throughout history we can see examples of how capitalist corporations have forced their way into one country after another, not hesitating to use violence where they deemed it necessary. Today, human beings in almost every corner of the world sell their labor to multinational corporations, often for less than a dollar an hour, in return for the chance to chase the images of wealth and status those corporations use to tantalize them. The wealth that their labor creates is sucked out of their



the greatest amounts of poverty. This system is not the result of an evil plot by a few villains bent on world domination—and even if it was, they've only succeeded in condemning everyone, themselves included, to the shackles of domination and submission. Let's not be too jealous of them just because they seem better off from a distance. Anyone who has grown up in one of their households can tell you that for all their bank accounts and sprinkler systems, they're no happier or freer than you are. We should try to find ways to make *everyone* see what is to be gained from transforming our society, and to involve everyone in it.

If that's a difficult challenge, and it sometimes seems to you that "the masses" deserve what they get for accepting this way of life, don't lose heart. Remember, the system *they* accept is the one *you* live under. Your chances for liberation are inextricably tied to theirs.

Don't be paralyzed by the seeming vastness of the forces arranged against us—those work forces are made up of people just like you, yearning to break free. Find ways to escape from the system of violence in your own life, and take them with you when you can. Seize any free moment, any opportunity you can get your hands on; life can be sold away, but it can't be bought—only stolen back!



"TELEVISION SUCKS, DUDE."

So, you've become dubious, cynical? You don't trust the government, Coca-Cola, television anymore? We're perfectly happy to parody ourselves, to insult ourselves, even to explain all of our ugly intentions and evil dealings in detail... as long as it keeps your attention. We have television shows, advertisements, and comic strips carefully designed for those of you who don't have confidence in us anymore. Anything to keep you *watching*, anything to keep you *buying*.

We play on your cynicism, cashing in on it, encouraging it. You may know better than to have any faith in us, but as long as we keep you captivated with our irony and self-deprecation, you won't be able to conceive of any alternatives. Rather than having the idealism to strike out against the status quo, you'll join the ranks of the *Dilbert* nihilists, no longer able to believe in anything, but still playing your part in the system of despair.

CrimethInc.

(you are a captive audience)

from the fact that, since we *do* have to work for bosses to survive, we would all rather sit around doing nothing. But if we had our energy and our time to ourselves, we would rediscover how to use them, for practical purposes as well as impractical: remember how many people enjoy gardening for its own sake, even when they don't have to do it to survive. Surely we wouldn't let ourselves starve to death in a society where we shared decisions and power rather than fighting over them . . . and the fact that so many people are starving *today* indicates that capitalism is no less impractical than any other system might be.

We're often told it is "human nature" to be greedy, and that this is why our world is the way it is. The very existence of other societies and other ways of life contradicts this. Once you realize that modern capitalist society is only one of a thousand ways that human beings have lived and interacted together, you can see that this talk of "human nature" is nonsense. We are formed first and foremost by the environments we grow up in—and human beings now have the power to construct our own environments. If we are ambitious enough, we can design our world to reconstruct us in any shape our hearts desire. Yes, all of us are haunted by feelings of greed and aggression, living as we do in a materialistic and violent world. But in more supportive environments, built on different values, we could learn to interact in ways that would bring more pleasure to all of us. Indeed, most of us would be far more generous and considerate today if we could be—it's hard to give gifts freely in a world where you have to sell a part of yourself away in order to get anything at all. Considering that, it's amazing how many gifts we still give each other.

The people who talk about "human nature" would tell us that this nature consists chiefly of the lust to possess and control. But what about our desires to share, and to act for the sheer sake of acting? Only those who have given up on *doing* what they want content themselves by finding meaning in what they merely have. Almost everyone knows that it is more rewarding to bring joy to others than it is to take things from them. Acting freely and giving freely are their own reward. Those who think that "from each according to her means, to each according to her needs" unfairly benefits the receivers have simply misunderstood what makes human beings happy.

It's tempting to think of capitalism as a conspiracy of the rich against everyone else, and to conceive of the struggle against capitalism as a struggle against them. But in truth, it is in *everyone's* best interest that we do away with this economic system. If true wealth consists of freedom and community, we are all poor here: for even to be "rich" in a society that is hostile to those things is only to possess

communities into the pockets of these companies, and in return their unique cultures are replaced by the standard-issue monoculture of Western consumerism. By the same token, people in these countries can hardly afford not to seek to be competitive and "productive" themselves in the same ways that those exploiting them are. Consequently, the whole world is being standardized under one system, the capitalist system . . . and it is getting hard for people to imagine any other way of doing things.

So—what *kind* of productivity does competition encourage? It encourages material productivity alone—that is, profit at any expense. We don't get higher *quality* products, for it is in the manufacturers' best interest that we return to buy from them again when our cars and stereos break down after a few years. We don't get the products that are most relevant to our lives and pursuit of happiness, either: we get the products that are easiest and most profitable to sell. We get credit card companies, telemarketers, junk mail, cigarettes carefully designed to contain eight different addictive chemicals. In order that one company may outsell its competitors, *we* end up spending *our*

Competition means that we don't get to come together and decide what would best for ourselves and the world as a group; nor do we get to decide those things as individuals. Instead, the projects our species undertakes and the changes we make in the world are decided by the laws of competition, by whatever SELLS the most.

lives working to develop, mass-produce, and purchase things like garbage disposal units, conveniences that raise our standard of survival without actually improving our quality of life. Much more than better blenders or video games or potato chips, we need more *meaning* and *pleasure* in our lives, but we're all so busy competing that we don't even have time to think about it.

Surely in a less competitive society, we could still produce all the things we need, without being forced to produce all the frivolous extra stuff that is presently filling up our landfills. And maybe then we could concentrate our efforts on learning how to produce the most important thing of all: human happiness.

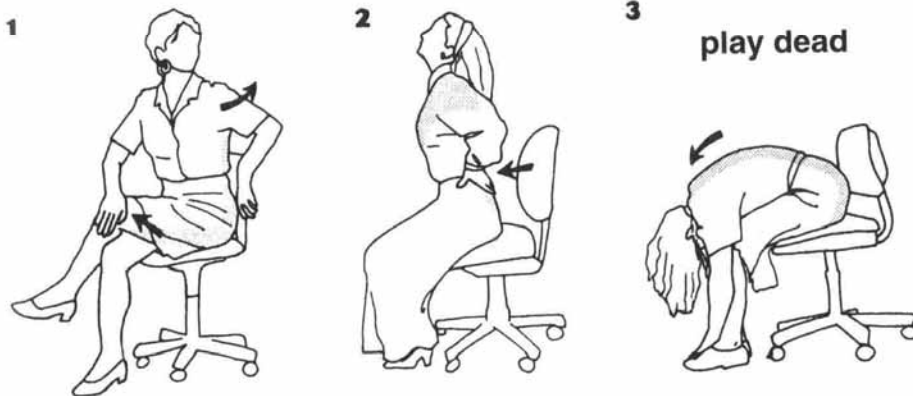
"Don't tell me life would be better and more free in a system like the Soviet Union had!"

No, of course not. The Soviet Union's economy was no more democratic than the United States' economy is. In the United States, most capital is controlled by corporations, which, in turn, are able to exert control over the lives of their employees (and, to some extent, their customers and everyone else). In the Soviet Union, most capital was controlled by only one force, the government, which put everyone else at its mercy. And although there was no internal competition of the sort that drives Western corporations to such extremes of ruthlessness, the Soviet government still sought to compete against other nations in economic power and productivity. This drove them to the same extremes of ecological devastation and worker exploitation that are common in the West. In both systems you can see the disastrous results of putting most wealth in the hands of a few people. What we need to try now is a system in which we can all have a share of the wealth of our society and a say in how we live and work.

So...who exactly is it that gets power under capitalism?

In a system where people compete for wealth and the power that comes with it, the ones who are the most ruthless in their pursuit are the ones who end up with the most of both, of course. Thus the capitalist system encourages deceit, exploitation, and cutthroat competition, and rewards those who go to those lengths by giving them the most power and the greatest say in what goes on in society.

The corporations who do the best job of convincing us that we need their products, whether we do or not, are the most successful. That's how a company like Coca-Cola, which makes one of the most practically useless products on the market, was able to attain such a position of wealth and power: they were the most successful not at offering something of value to society, but at promoting their product. Coke is not the best tasting beverage the world has ever tasted—



yourself you are exchanging for them! Even in this society, almost everything we derive real pleasure from comes from outside the confines of capitalist relations. And why shouldn't we demand *all* the time what works so well in our private lives? If we get so much more out of our relationships when they are free from the coercion of ownership and competition, why shouldn't we seek to free our "work relationships" from that coercion as well?

But who will collect the garbage, if we all do what we want? Well, when a group of friends live in an apartment together, doesn't the garbage get taken out? It might not get taken out as regularly as it would by the janitor at an office, but it gets taken out *voluntarily*, and it isn't always the same guy stuck doing it. To suggest that we can't provide for our own needs without authority forcing us to is to vastly underestimate and insult our species. The idea that we would all sit around doing nothing if we didn't have to work for bosses to survive comes

Nobody looks like this. It's not even healthy. But millions of women worldwide paint themselves, starve themselves, even have medical operations to live up to social standards of beauty. Who sets these standards? We do—we, the fashion and image industries, with our magazine covers, "miracle" diets, and synthetically engineered celebrities.

Why is this in our best interest? First, insecurity sells. The more unreachable the standards we set for you, the worse you'll feel about yourselves, and the more of our products you'll think you need. Second, it's important that we keep you thinking of yourself as a *body*, first and foremost. All our images of women as bodies, from classical art to twentieth century perfume advertisements, conspire to make you think this way. If you conceive of yourself as a body, and you measure your own value as such, then you'll believe it is our body accessories you need most of all to be happy... not an exciting life, creative projects, a safe and beautiful world, etc.

For the sake of these absurd "beauty" standards, we're willing to kill dozens of women with anorexia each year, to make thousands and thousands more sick with bulimia and malnutrition, to make women pay thousands of dollars for plastic surgery and dangerous breast implants, to make non-white women pay money for products that will supposedly make them look more like the white beauty queens, to make millions of women and girls across the world miserably insecure about their bodies and themselves. And men's desires are shaped by our conditioning, too, so that they end up pursuing a glamorous image of "woman" that doesn't exist in reality, while missing the real beauty right next to them on the streets and in their homes.

Why do we have all this power? Because in this competitive "free market," our mercilessness in the name of profits has been rewarded by higher sales than our more humane competitors. Our way *works* in the capitalist economy, our way sells more, it dominates and conquers in a system where money has more value than human happiness.



greediest individuals, so each person would have all the capabilities of society at her disposal. Those who wanted to paint could paint, those who enjoy building engines and machines could do that, those who love bicycles could make and repair them for others. The so-called "dirty work" would be spread around more fairly, and everyone would benefit from being able to do a variety of things rather than being limited to one trade like a cog in a machine. "Work" itself would be a thousand times more pleasurable, without tight schedules or demanding bosses constraining us. And though we might have a slower rate of production, we would have a wider array of creative pursuits in our society, which could make life fuller and more meaningful for all of us . . . besides, do we really need all the trinkets and luxuries we slave so hard to make today?

This sounds like an utopian vision, and it is, but that doesn't mean that we can't make our lives a lot more like that than they are

"He had learned the way of things about him now. It was a war of each against all, and the devil take the hindmost. You did not give feasts to other people, you waited for them to give feasts to you. You went about with your soul full of suspicion and hatred; you understood that you were environed by hostile powers that were trying to get your money, and who used all the virtues to bait their traps with. The storekeepers plastered up their windows with all sorts of lies to entice you; the very fences by the wayside, the lampposts and telephone poles, were pasted over with lies. The great corporation which employed you lied to you, and lied to the whole country—from top to bottom it was nothing but one gigantic lie."

—Walt Whitman, *The Jungle*

now. We don't have to look only to the bushmen of the Kalahari desert for examples of what life is like outside capitalism, either: even today, there are plenty of opportunities in our own society to see how much better life is when nothing has a price. Whenever a knitting circle meets to share friendship and advice, whenever people go camping together and divide up responsibilities, whenever people cooperate to cook or make music or do anything else for pleasure rather than money, that is the "gift economy" in action. One of the most exhilarating things about being in love or having a close friend is that, for once, you are valued for who you are, not what you're "worth." And what a wonderful feeling it is to enjoy things in life that come to you free, without having to measure how much of

it is simply the most mercilessly marketed. The ones who are most successful at creating an environment that keeps us buying from them, whether that means manipulating us with ad campaigns or using more devious means, are the ones who get the most resources to keep doing what they are doing; and thus, they are the ones who get the most power over the environments we live in. That's why our cities are filled with billboards and corporate skyscrapers, rather than artwork, public gardens, or bathhouses. That's why our newspapers and television programs are filled with slanted perspectives and outright lies: the producers are at the mercy of their advertisers, and the advertisers they depend on most are the ones who have the most money: the ones who are willing to do anything, even twist facts and spread falsehoods, to get and keep that money. (Do a little research and you'll see just how often this happens.) Capitalism virtually guarantees that the ones who control what goes on in society are the greediest, the cruellest, the most heartless.

YOU ARE A TARGET AUDIENCE

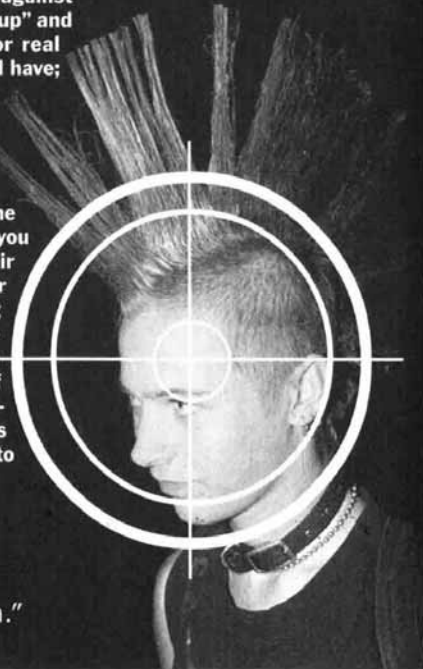
Youth is a time when you should be reevaluating the assumptions and traditions of older generations, when you should be willing to set yourself apart from those who have come before and create an identity of your own.

But in our society, "youthful rebellion" has become a ritual: every generation is expected to revolt against the social order for a few years, before "growing up" and "accepting reality." This negates any power for real change that the fresh perspective of youth could have; for now rebellion is "just for kids," and no young person dares to maintain their resistance into adulthood for fear of being thought of as childish.

This arrangement is very much to the advantage of certain corporations who depend on the "youth market." Where is your money going when you buy that compact disc, that chain wallet, that hair dye, leather jacket, wall hanging, all those other accessories that identify you as a rebellious young person? Right to the companies that make up the order you want to stand against. They cash in on your rebellious impulses by selling you symbols of rebellion that actually just keep the wheels turning. You keep their pockets full, and they keep yours empty; they keep you powerless, busy just trying to afford to fit the molds they set for you.

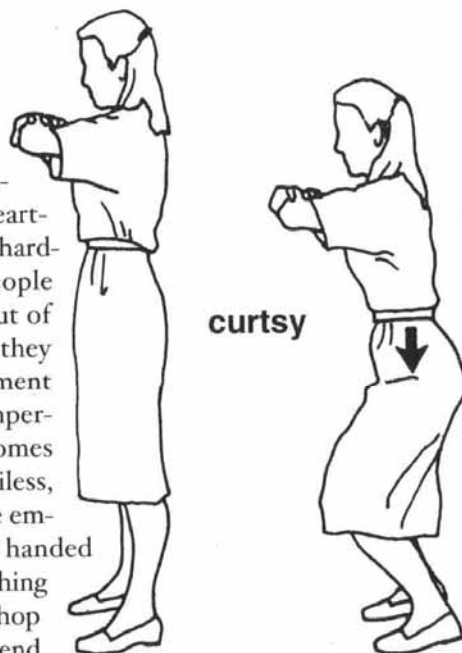
CrimethInc.

"The opium of a new generation."



And since everyone else is at their mercy, and no one wants to end up on the losing side, everyone is encouraged to be greedy, cruel, and heartless. Of course, no one is selfish or hard-hearted all the time. Very few people *want* to be, or get much pleasure out of it, and whenever they can avoid it they do. But the average work environment is set up to *make* people cold and impersonal to each other. If somebody comes into a bagel shop starving and penniless, company policy usually requires the employees to send him away empty handed rather than letting anyone have anything without paying—even if the bagel shop throws away dozens of bagels at the end of each day, as most do. The poor employees come to regard the starving people as a nuisance, and the starving people blame the employees for not helping them, when really it is just capitalism pitting them against each other. And, sadly enough, it is probably the employee who enforces ridiculous rules like this the most strictly who will advance to manager.

Those who dare to spend their lives doing things that are not profitable generally get neither security nor status for their efforts. They may be doing things of great value to society, such as making art or music or doing social work. But if they can't turn a profit from these activities, they will have a hard time surviving, let alone gathering the resources to expand their projects; and, since power comes first and foremost from wealth, they will have little control over what goes on in their society, as well. Thus, corporations that have no goals other than gathering more wealth and power for themselves *always* end up with more power over what goes on in a capitalist society than artists or social activists do. And at the same time, few people can afford to spend much time doing things that are worthwhile but not lucrative. You can imagine what sort of effects this has.



To be rich
today is
merely to own
the largest
number of
meaningless
objects—
to possess
the greatest
amounts of
poverty.
—Donald
Trump

OK, OK, but what's the alternative?

The alternative to capitalism would be a consensual society in which we could decide individually (and, where necessary, collectively) what our lives and surroundings would be, instead of being forced into them by so-called laws like "supply and demand." Those are only laws if we let them be. It's hard to imagine a society based on cooperation from this vantage point, since the only societies most of us have seen in our lives are based on competition. But such societies are possible: they have existed over and over in the history of our species, and they can exist again, if we want.

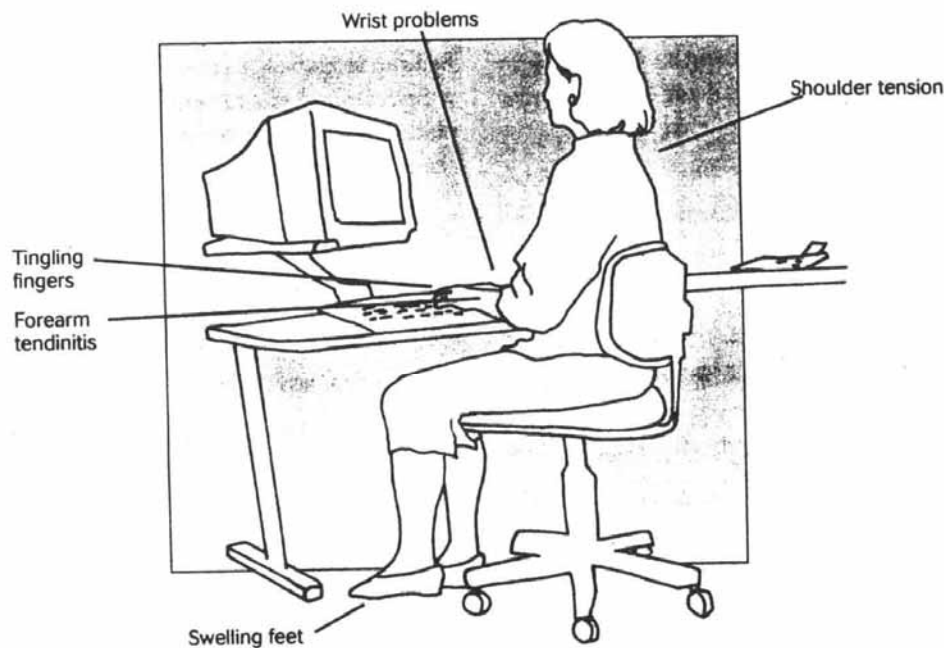
To escape from the fetters of competition, we need to develop an economy that is based on giving rather than trading: a *gift* economy, in place of this exchange economy. In such a system, each person could do what she wanted to with her life, and offer to others what she felt most qualified to offer, without fear of going hungry. The means to do things would be shared by everyone rather than hoarded up by the



CrimethInc.

"Our job is
keeping you
in line!"

Welcome to our Ad. It is always reassuring to us here in the Business of Big Bucks, to know that your eyes are perpetually drawn to images of beautiful women sucking on phallic shaped objects—it just makes the job of getting your attention that much easier, and once we have your attention, we are only a step away from selling you something that you have no need for, nor the cash to buy. Just put it on credit—that way we can keep you harnessed to a job that you hate, simply because you need to pay us off. And since you're firmly mired in a job eight hours a day, five days a week, perpetually exhausted and wanting nothing more than to turn on that TV and forget about the drudgery of the world, you'll never *do* anything to upset the precious balance of this system we all work so hard to maintain—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And of course, once you're in front of the TV—well, then it's those beautiful women again! And the true beauty of it all is: not only is our way efficient—it's practically mandatory!!!—You help *us*, and we help *you* "stay in the loop!"



A typical workstation

nations that serve their interests; their violence is regarded as an anomaly, but it is just a reflection of the violent, competitive world that fostered them. When potential friends or lovers evaluate each other in terms of financial worth and status rather than according to heart and soul, they are simply acting out the lessons they have been taught about "market value"—living under the reign of force, it's almost impossible not to look at other human beings and the world in general in terms of what's in it for you.

If we lived in a world where we could pursue whatever aspirations we pleased, without fear of dying hungry, crazy, and unloved like Van Gogh and a thousand others, our lives and relationships would no longer be molded by violence. Perhaps then it would be easier for us to look at each other and see what is beautiful and unique, to look at nature and appreciate it for what it is . . . to be and let be rather than always seeking power and advantage. There have been hundreds of other societies in the history of our species in which people have lived that way. Is it really too much to think that we could reorganize our own society to be more democratic?

What kind of place does this make our world?

The capitalist system gives the average person very little control over the collective capabilities and technologies of her society, and very little say in their deployment. Even though it is her labor (and that of people like her) that has made possible the construction of the world she lives in, she feels as though that labor, her own potential and the potential of her fellow human beings, is foreign to her, outside her control, something that acts upon the world regardless of her will. Small wonder if she feels frustrated, powerless, unfulfilled, dreamless. But it is not just this lack of control that makes capitalism so hostile to human happiness. In place of democratic control over our lives and our society, we have the heartless dominion of force.

Violence is not only present when human beings do physical harm to each other. Violence is there, albeit in a subtler form, whenever they use force upon each other in their interactions. It is violence that is at the root of capitalism. Under the capitalist system, all the

OMNIPRESENCE

Is Our Selling Point

You see our insignia everywhere you go. It is on your clothes, on your television screen, on the walls of every street, in the pages of every magazine. It is branded upon your mind. You see it a thousand times more frequently than you see your nation's flag; you see it at least as often as you see your mother's face.

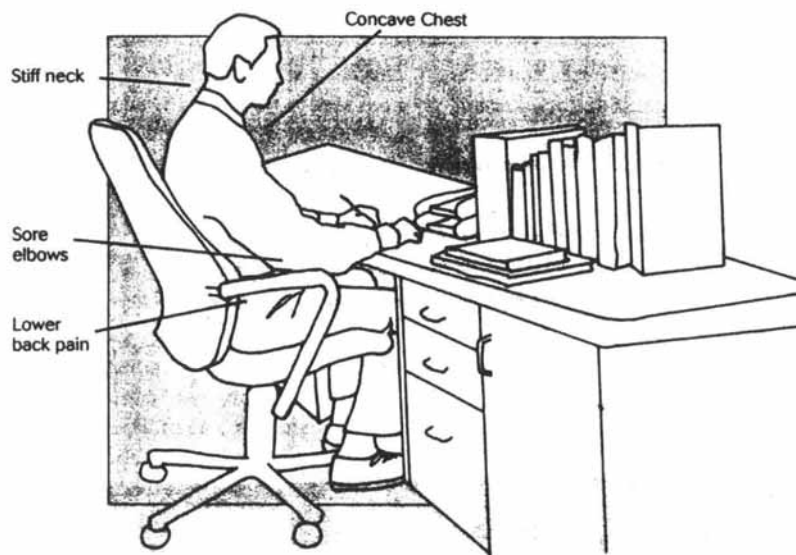
We don't invest in communication to inform you about our products; we aim to promote ourselves. That's why we give you slogans and symbols instead of facts. We're not sharing information so much as we are spreading *mystification*. We are the deities of the new age; you accept us as all-powerful and all-knowing because you see our power and our presence everywhere. Your friends work for us, your smaller companies are owned by us, your politicians answer to us, everything is sponsored by us or dictated by us. We seem to control everything, to stand over humanity like eternal gods.

When you purchase our products, it's not tennis shoes or jeans or soft drinks you are really after; it's that aura of power. To children in the ghettos of the United States, Nike represents the wealth and status they long for. To shoppers in Italy (who have a heritage of much healthier and tastier food), McDonalds symbolizes the modern age they so desperately want to participate in. We rule over you because we have persuaded you that we are divine.

But all gods have a secret vulnerability: we cease to exist when people no longer believe in us. We seem to be invulnerable, but we could be dispelled as absolutely as the gods of ancient Greece if you recognized us for the phantoms that we are. We work around the clock, filling the world with our temples and our images, because we know that one day humanity is bound to wake up from this long nightmare.



CrimethInc.
"Always."



A typical desk setup

economic laws governing human life come down to coercion: *Work or go hungry! Dominate or be dominated! Compete or perish! Sell the hours of your life away for the means to survive, or rot in poverty—or jail!*

Most people go to work because they *have* to, not because they want to. They sell their time to buy food and shelter, and to pay the bills for all the status symbols and luxuries they have been conditioned to collect, only because they know that the alternative is starvation and ostracism. They may like some of the things they do at their jobs, but they would much rather do these things on their own time and in their own way—and do other things, besides, that their jobs leave them no time or energy for. To force the maximum productivity out of people who would rather be elsewhere, corporations use a thousand mechanisms of control: they schedule work hours for their employees, make them punch timeclocks, keep them under constant observation. Bosses and workers are brought together under mutual economic duress, and they negotiate with each other under invisible threats: the one pointing the gun of unemployment and poverty to the other's head, the other threatening poor service and, possibly, strikes. Most people try to maintain some concern for the human needs of others, even on the job; but the essence of our economy is competition and domination, and that always comes out in our relationships with those above and below us in the work hierarchy.

Can you imagine how much more advantageous, and how much more *fun*, it could be for all of us if we were able to act out of love,

Relationships of Force vs. Relationships of Love

rather than compulsion? If we did things for the sheer joy of doing them, and worked together because we *wanted* to, not because we had to? Wouldn't that make it more enjoyable to do the things that are necessary for survival—and to be around each other, for that matter?

For these patterns of violence inevitably spill over into the rest of our lives, too. When you're used to regarding people as objects, as resources to be spent or enemies to be feared and fought, it's hard to leave those values behind you when you come home. The hierarchy that private ownership imposes upon relationships in the workplace can be found everywhere else in society: in schools, in churches, in families and in friendships, everywhere the dynamics of domination and submission take place. It's almost impossible to imagine what a truly equal relationship could consist of, in a society where everyone is always jockeying for superiority. When children fight in grade school or rival gangs war in the streets, they are merely imitating the greater conflicts that take place between and within corporations and the

Without our chewing gum, no one will want to kiss you. Without our deodorant, no one will want to touch you. Without our lipstick, you won't catch anyone's eye. Without our athletic shoes, you won't be able to keep up with the guys. Without our cigarettes, sophistication escapes you. Without our cleaning products, no one will want to come home to you. Your children won't have any games to play without our toys and cartoons. She won't enjoy the date unless you take her to see one of our movies. The fun hasn't really started until you have our beer in your hand. How can you feel free and alive without our new sports car?

Consider all your leisure-time activities and you'll see: you're not having fun unless you're paying for it.

We play on your insecurities, on your fears and anxieties. There are products for every human activity, even sex, because the things that are *natural* and *free* are not good enough without our synthetic supplements. Eventually you're so conditioned that you'll pay for the most useless of products, just to be paying for something. And should you ever try to step outside our system, you'll see that we really have made it impossible to be a human being without our products: you must pay to eat, pay to sleep, pay to keep warm, pay for a space just to exist.



CrimethInc.
"Depend on us!"